

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY OF
GLASGOW: THE MISSING YEARS, 1851 TO 1859**

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INTRODUCTION

The Natural History Society of Glasgow was instituted on 2nd July 1851, and seventeen years later, in October 1868, it published the first part of what was described at the time as Volume One of its *Proceedings*, covering the activities of the Society from its eighth Annual General Meeting on 27th September 1859. This volume number, however, was an error, since the Society had already published a previous volume of *Proceedings* in 1852 and, in addition, quite contrary to what members might have assumed from a short prefatory Note to the 1868 volume, regular accounts of the Society's activities during its earliest years, plus several important papers read to the Society, had previously been published in Morris's *Naturalist* from 1851 to 1857, some of the early 'missing years'.

The 1852 volume of *Proceedings* was later reprinted by the Scottish Natural History Library, as part of its series of reissued scarce or unusual Scottish natural history items, and at several Scottish meetings of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History I have previously drawn attention to the existence of these early historical records of the Glasgow Society in Morris's *Naturalist*, but have not so far published the information, so the 150th anniversary of the founding of our Society seems to be the ideal time to set the record straight.

THE PROCEEDINGS OF 1852 AND 1868

In 1852 the Society issued its first publication, a booklet containing sixteen pages, trimmed to 8¹/₂ by 5¹/₂ inches, in blank pink-paper covers, entitled *Proceedings of the Natural History Society of Glasgow* (see Figure 1), detailing the activities of the Society during the first six months of its existence, from July to December 1851. In the 1868 Note these *Proceedings* were called a "fasciculus".

For the next sixteen years the Society itself published nothing more, but in October 1868 it issued Volume One, Part One of a new publication, again entitled *Proceedings of the Natural History Society of Glasgow*, with printed buff-board covers showing the Society's Glasgow crest, and measuring some 8³/₄ by 5³/₄ inches untrimmed, the standard format maintained over the following years.

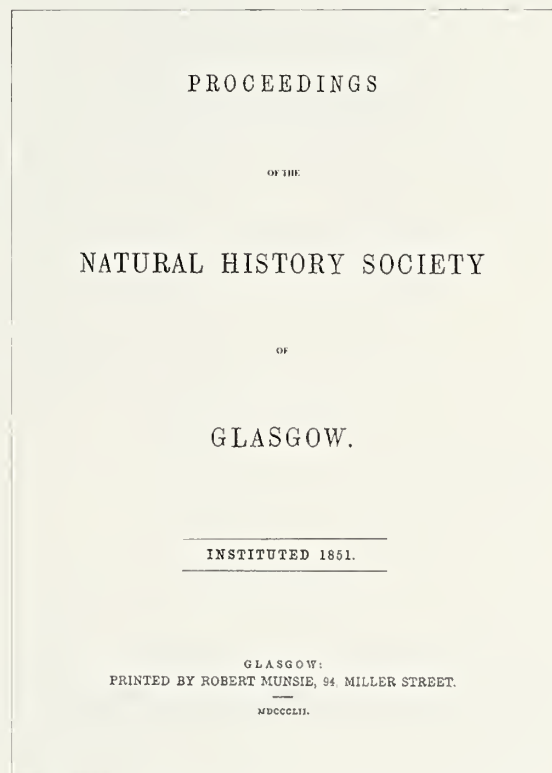


Fig. 1. Title-page of the first volume of *Proceedings* (1852).

It was most unfortunate that the first volume of these new *Proceedings* was entitled Volume One, which was clearly incorrect, when some alternative numbering, such as Volume Two or Volume One (new series) could easily have been used and would have been much more appropriate. These new *Proceedings* published in 1868 summarised the activities of the Society from the commencement "of the Eight Session" on 27th September 1859, but unfortunately contained no record of the earlier activities of the Society, before 1859. To be quite fair, at the start of Volume One, Part One there was a preliminary one-page Note, unsigned, dated 29th September 1868 (the date of the seventeenth Annual General Meeting), which

THE CRAIG OF AILSA.

BY GEORGE DONALDSON, ESQ.

Read before the Natural History Society of Glasgow.

It has frequently been a matter of considerable surprise to me, that so little notice has been taken of a place so admirably adapted by nature for our instruction, and which in my opinion has been completely overlooked, at all events by the Ornithologist, and my surprise is increased when I find that Macgillivray and Audubon, when visiting the Bass together, as they did in 1835, should have overlooked the Craig. In no instance can I quote the practical remarks of any interested in the science; and it is only an occasional reference which points out its existence at all as an aviary, and that too in such a remote way as would scarcely induce one to visit it, so that it is more with a view of bringing it prominently before you that I have been induced to make the present remarks, than for any information which may be obtained from me, and that it may pave the way for some of the members of this Society, at some future period, to furnish us with much detail that I must have overlooked.

Independent of its attractions as one of the greatest breeding situations in this country, it possesses many other beauties; and I have no doubt that both the Geologist and the Botanist have found much there to interest them; (and although rather deficient in both of these sciences,) I could not help gazing in astonishment from the base, at its majestic and precipitous grandeur, and this arises not so much from its height, (which is computed at only twelve hundred feet,) as from the insulated position which it occupies.* The incessant screaming and croaking of myriads of Sea-Gulls, Solan Geese, Razor-bills, and Guillemots, during the summer, is beyond description, and renders it in my opinion a scene rarely to be met with. This extraordinary confusion of tongues is a striking contrast to the silence which prevails during the winter months, for, with the exception of the hollow croak of the Raven, and the occasional scream of a storm-steed Sea-Gull, all is hushed up.

How and when the rock came here would be quite as difficult for me to account for, as the production of either Dumbarton Castle or the Bass Rock, unless we acquiesce in the popular tradition of its removal from out of the hill of Knockgriran, in the parish of Dailey, in Ayrshire, and being cast into the sea through the mystic influence of a witch called Maggie Osborne, as a stepping-stone for her from Carrick into Cantyre: as this hypothesis is rather doubtful, we must fall back upon geological authority, and acknowledge a primary formation with a proportion of basalt.

I am afraid you would find it a tedious narrative were I to enter into

* J. W. Naul, a smuggler, was cast ashore here about fifty years ago, with part of his wreck. He lived three months upon it, during the winter subsisting entirely upon Limpits, (*Patalia vulgata*) Dog Wilks, (*Purpura lapillus*) and a cask of French Brandy, (requiring no interpretation,) which had been washed ashore with him.

NOTE.

THE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY OF GLASGOW was instituted on 2nd July, 1851. The original circular, calling the first meeting, was written by the present Secretary, and the following gentlemen who attended this preliminary meeting constituted the Society under the name it now bears:—Dr W. B. Lorrain; Messrs William Gourlie, Thomas Gray, William Ferguson, James P. Fraser, Robert Gray, John Gray, Thomas Ferguson, and Archibald Gray. Seven days later, the names of Dr Hugh Colquhoun and Mr William Keddle were added to the list of original members.

The office-bearers at that time consisted of a President and a Secretary; and the meetings—extending over the whole year—were held on the first Tuesday of each month.

The Society has since continued to hold regular meetings, and the minutes of these have all been preserved. During the first five years, however, the materials, with the exception of those published in a fasciculus of sixteen pages, edited by Mr William Ferguson, were not sufficiently described so as to be available for after use; and as the Proceedings during a later interval do not present much novelty or interest, it has been decided to begin the present Volume with those of the Eighth Session.*

The Proceedings contained in the following pages have been, to a great extent, transcribed from the Secretary's minute-book. The papers given *in extenso* have been supplied and revised by the various authors, who alone are responsible for the views and information they contain. The paper on Diatoms by the late Professor Walker-Arnott, has been printed since his death: it was carefully revised in manuscript, and completed, by its lamented author, during the progress of his last illness; and was, it is believed, his final literary effort.

* The only important object, among the various subjects exhibited, which this arrangement excludes, is the Ruby-crowned wren (*Regulus calendula*), a North American species, which was shot in Kennmore Wood, on the banks of Loch Lomond, and laid before the members at the ordinary monthly meeting, held on 27th April, 1853.

Fig. 2 The 1868 Note

Fig. 3 First page of a paper read to the Society and published in Morris's *Naturalist*

attempted to explain the omission (see Figure 2). This preliminary Note, however, was seriously flawed in several important respects.

THE 1868 NOTE

Firstly, no proper attention was drawn to the existence of this Note, indeed one could easily think that its very existence was almost concealed, since most surprisingly it was omitted from the List of Contents issued with Volume One, Part One (1868), nor was it included in the complete List of Contents for Volume One, later issued with the second part of Volume Two in 1876.

Since there was no mention of the Note in the List of Contents, this page was frequently discarded, along with the covers (a common practice of the time), by subsequent binders, so that many bound volumes of the Society's *Proceedings* do not include this Note, with the result that some later researchers could easily be deceived into believing that no earlier *Proceedings* or other publications existed. Fortunately, this preliminary Note is present in the bound volumes possessed by most of the major national collections, plus the Society's own library, but these are in the minority and the Note has been missing from over twenty bound volumes of the Society's *Proceedings* which I have managed to examine during the past fifty years; no doubt there are many more.

Secondly, nowhere in the Note is there any indication at all that the sixteen-page publication of 1852, called a "fasciculus", was actually the first volume of the Society's *Proceedings*, and bears the title-page *Proceedings of the Natural History Society of Glasgow* (Figure 1). This is a serious and highly misleading omission, and future generations of Society members, even if they were so fortunate as to be consulting a bound volume which did actually include the Note, could be forgiven for assuming that this fasciculus was simply one of several ephemera issued by the Society, such as notices, newsletters &c, and not genuine *Proceedings*.

There is a further interesting point. These first *Proceedings* were not included in the list of the Society's publications which were regularly advertised, with prices, on the back covers of each succeeding part of the later *Proceedings*. This could not have been just because the first *Proceedings* were out of print, since other parts of the later *Proceedings* were listed even although they were also described as being 'out-of-print'. The first *Proceedings* were simply omitted; it is almost as though their existence was being concealed.

Very much later, when the cumulative Index to the *Proceedings* was published (in 1885), the Index was entitled 'Vols. 1 to V. - 1851-1883', so the existence of the earlier *Proceedings* was now

TABLE 1

Proceedings of the Natural History Society of Glasgow

Published in the *The Naturalist* (Morris's), Vols. 2(1852) - 5(1855)

	Date of Meeting	Reference
Vol. 2:	02.07.51	2: 23
	09.07.51*	2: 23
	05.08.51*	2: 23-24
	07.10.51	2: 39
	04.11.51	2: 39-40
	02.12.51*	2: 40
	06.01.52*	2: 87-88
	03.02.52	2: 112
	02.03.52	2: 112
	06.04.52*	2: 183-184
Vol. 3:	05.10.52*	3: 23-24
	02.11.52*	3: 38-39
Vol. 4:	06.12.53	4: 46
	07.02.54*	4: 92-93
Vol. 5	04.07.54	5: 17
	01.08.54*	5: 17-19
	05.09.54*	5: 19-20
	03.10.54*	5: 20-21, 41-43
	07.11.54*	5: 43-45

*Meetings reported in some detail

acknowledged by date, and the start of the general section of the Index also included the following preliminary announcement: "When the number of the volume is not given, the reference is to the First Part of the *Proceedings*, which is not included in vol. i". It would appear, therefore, that some belated attempt was being made to correct the earlier mistaken position, even although the volume numbers and dates on the Index title-page could have been more accurately described.

Even more unfortunately, however, the 1868 Note was categorically wrong when it stated "During the first five years [1851-1855] ... the materials were not sufficiently described so as to be available for after use; and ... the *Proceedings* during a later interval do not present much novelty or interest". This is completely untrue, and the reason for this wholly inaccurate statement is a considerable mystery. It would have been just as easy to write a short paragraph outlining the true position.

In actual fact, many of the early *Proceedings* of the Society from its foundation in July 1851 had already been published in contemporary parts of Morris's *Naturalist* from Volume 2 (1852) to Volume 5 (1855); these included several substantial items reported in some detail, and also several important papers, up to 1857, subtitled 'Read before the Natural History Society of Glasgow' and printed *in extenso* (e.g. Figure 3). A

TABLE 2

Published Papers, 1851 to 1859

Subtitled 'Read before the Natural History Society of Glasgow'

Scouler, John (1851)

Of the occurrence of the remains of the Reindeer in Scotland.

Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal **52**, 135-137.

Fraser, James P. (1852)

Notes illustrative of the geology of part of the shores of East Lothian and Berwickshire.

Naturalist (Morris's) **2**, 173-177, 195-200.

Donaldson, George (1854)

The Craig of Ailsa.

Naturalist (Morris's) **4**, 119-125.

Donaldson, George (1854)

The arrival, nestling, habits, and departure of the sea-fowl at the Craig of Ailsa.

Naturalist (Morris's) **4**: 125-127.

Gray, Robert (1857)

Remarks upon the Ringed Guillemot.

Naturalist (Morris's) **7**, 166-171.

list of the Society meetings reported in Morris's *Naturalist* is given in Table 1. Table 2 lists the papers marked as read to the Society and published *in extenso* in Morris's *Naturalist* and elsewhere.

In the 1868 Note there is no indication that all this early published material exists, indeed its existence is apparently denied, and possible reasons for this omission are discussed later.

MORRIS'S NATURALIST

Morris's *Naturalist* was a highly regarded journal of its day, which published many important and often pioneer scientific papers. Edited from 1851 to 1858, firstly by Dr. B.R. Morris (who was elected a Corresponding Member of the Natural History Society of Glasgow on 2nd March 1852) and then by the Rev. F.O. Morris, and nowadays usually referred to as the *Naturalist* (Morris's), it was part of a nearly continuous series of journals called *The Naturalist*, with an earlier series from 1837 to 1839 (usually called Wood's) and later continued from the 1860s to the present day.

Many prominent members of the Natural History Society of Glasgow published the results of their researches in its pages, both before and after the formation of the Glasgow Society, and at least four major papers published from 1852 to 1857 (i.e. years during which the Glasgow Society was

not publishing its own *Proceedings*) were subtitled 'Read before the Natural History Society of Glasgow'; one of these papers was by the Society's Secretary, Robert Gray, who also contributed several other important papers, not marked as read to the Society. The journal also had a regular section called 'Proceedings of Societies' which published accounts of the meetings of many scientific societies, both local and national, so it was perfectly natural that the new Natural History Society of Glasgow should have its activities included.

The only mystery is why all this easily accessible source of early Society history was not later reported to the Society's members; it would have been so easy to insert an appropriate explanatory paragraph into the 1868 Note. Possibly the 1868 Note's most serious omission, however, was its complete failure to make any mention of Professor John Scouler, the Society's original Honorary President.

PROFESSOR JOHN SCOULER

The fact that many of the early Proceedings of the Society were never published, or were overlooked, plus subsequent faulty reporting, has been less than kind to the memory and reputation of Professor John Scouler (Fig. 4), the Society's first Honorary President. Professor Scouler, born in Glasgow and Professor of Natural History at Glasgow's Andersonian University from 1829 to 1833, was a distinguished natural historian of his day who, at the time of the formation of the Glasgow Society in 1851, was currently Professor of Natural History at the Royal Society of Dublin. During his time in Dublin, however, he regularly travelled back to Glasgow, and again became resident in Glasgow from 1853, when he retired from his Dublin professorship on grounds of increasingly failing health.

At a "preliminary meeting" on 2nd July 1851 nine men met and agreed to form a society, "under the name of the Natural History Society of Glasgow", as later correctly detailed in the 1868 Note. Mr. William Gourlay was elected President, and Mr. James P. Fraser was elected Secretary and Treasurer. One week later, at the second meeting (called an "extraordinary meeting") on 9th July, Professor John Scouler read the first-ever paper delivered to the Society, entitled 'On the Symmetry of Plants and Animals', and immediately afterwards it was "proposed that Dr. Scouler be elected Honorary President of the Society, which was carried by acclamation". This was followed by the election of two other "Original Members".

All this was correctly reported both in the relevant section of Morris's *Naturalist* and later in the Society's own 1852 volume of *Proceedings*. Examination of those accounts of the Society's later meetings which did actually appear in print, up to

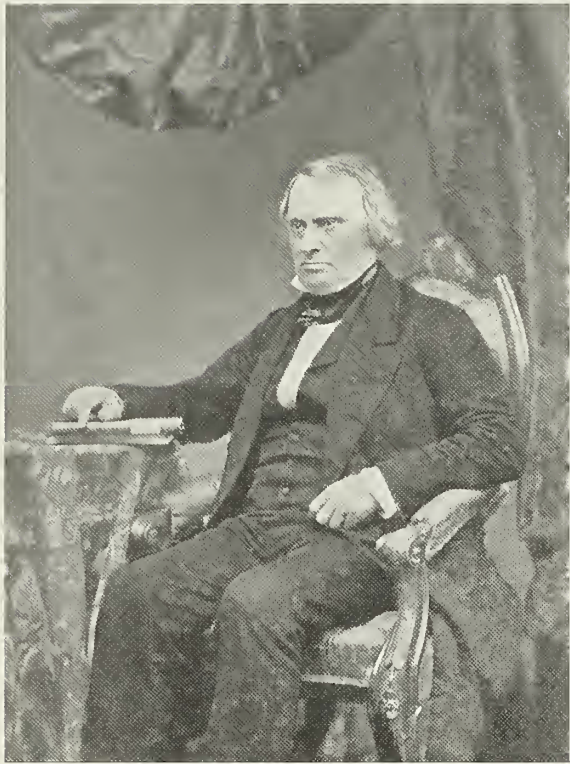


Fig. 4 Professor John Scouler, portrait reproduced from the *History of the Geological Society of Glasgow* (1908), by MacNair, P. and Mort, F.

the end of 1854 in Morris's *Naturalist*, show that Professor Scouler was no mere figure-head. With his reputation, regular attendance at meetings, and his several important scientific papers, either directly read or otherwise communicated, he probably played a greater part than anyone else in the early development of the Society, and well merited his appointment as Honorary President, by which title he was always referred to in reports of the Society's meetings. He continued to play a very active part in all the Society's activities, seldom missing a meeting, until 1866.

Despite all this, nowhere in the 1868 Note, which attempted to describe the formation of the Society in 1851 by giving a list of the "Original Members", is there even a mention of Professor Scouler, an omission which seems both inexcusable and nearly inexplicable. There may, however, be a possible explanation. In its early days the Society, apart from its Honorary Members, classed its members as 'resident', those actually living within the city of Glasgow or nearby, and 'corresponding', those living much further away, and the later anonymous, and apparently inadequately informed, writer of the 1868 Note may have mistakenly restricted the list of "Original Members" to those who were 'resident', thereby overlooking the Society's only Honorary and most distinguished member.

By the time of the eighth Annual General Meeting, held on 27th September 1859, which was the first meeting reported in the Society's 1868 *Proceedings*, we find Professor Scouler recorded not as Honorary President, but as President of the Society. The year when he became President is not stated, and presumably can now only be established by referring to the Society's Minutes, should these exist in sufficient detail. It should be noted that, during this time, Professor Scouler also held office as President (1859-62) of the Geological Society of Glasgow. Professor Scouler served as President of the Natural History Society until the fifteenth Annual General Meeting on 25th September 1866 when he retired, being succeeded as President by Dr. Hugh Colquhoun. He continued as a Member of Council, but for only one more year, presumably because of his steadily deteriorating health.

At some time, therefore, between 1851 when he was elected Honorary President, and 1859 when he was shown as President, Professor Scouler apparently changed from being Honorary President to President. So what is the explanation? Did he hold both offices at the same time, did he temporarily relinquish the position of Honorary President when he became President, and after he retired as President did he again become Honorary President? Was the office of Honorary President eventually abolished, or did it simply fall into disuse after Professor Scouler's death because there was no other suitable candidate? As far as can be ascertained from the published *Proceedings*, the Society never again had an Honorary President. This distinctly blurred part of the Society's early history has always considerably perplexed me, and just after the centenary celebrations, in an attempt to clear up the matter, I asked to see the Society's early Minutes, where the correct information would presumably be recorded, but despite several requests, the Minutes could not be produced.

Professor Scouler died in 1871, and in a brief and somewhat inadequate death notice (*Proceedings*, 2: 175; 1876), he was certainly referred to as the first Honorary President of the Society, although the year of his election was incorrectly given as 1853, a date not subsequently corrected in the later more generous account of his life (*Glasgow Naturalist*, 18: 210-212; 1962). This makes me wonder whether the relevant Minutes, which could not be produced in 1951, were also missing in 1871, so that, when the time came to write Professor Scouler's death notice, the Society did not have the benefit of any written record. In the 1868 Note the Society's early Minutes were said to have "all been preserved" but "were not sufficiently described so as to be available for after use", which seems very suspicious. Missing or inadequate Minutes, and having to rely on a faulty memory, especially since most of the original members were no longer available, might also account for the many inaccuracies in the 1868 Note.

With the Society now reaching its 150th anniversary, however, a serious search should be made in an attempt to discover the whereabouts of the first eight years' Minutes, in the hope that this early history of the Society can at long last be properly recorded.

DISCUSSION

It is very difficult to understand why these fairly extensive, and often important, published Society activities were not reported, or at least some indication given that they actually existed, rather than their existence being apparently obscured. Quite apart from the papers separately published *in extenso*, the Society meetings reported in Morris's *Naturalist* contained significant printed contributions by many prominent members of the Society, including George Donaldson, Thomas Ferguson, William Ferguson, James P. Fraser, John Gray, Robert Gray, Roger Hennedy, William B. Lorrain, and John Scouler, plus an extended obituary of the Rev. Dr. David Landsborough. This is all important material, and members should certainly have been told that it existed.

Reports of the Society's meetings during the first six months of its existence, from July to December 1851, appeared in both the Society's own first *Proceedings* and in the 'Proceedings of Societies' section of Morris's *Naturalist*, and if we compare these two sets of reports it can be seen that they are extremely similar, with the accounts of some meetings identical word for word. Moreover, the later Society reports in Morris's *Naturalist* are presented in almost precisely the same style as the meetings reported from 1859 onwards in the Society's own later *Proceedings*, so with this (plus Dr. Beverley R. Morris's close connection with the Glasgow Society, noted earlier) there seems little doubt that these were all official communications provided to Morris's *Naturalist* by the Society. Steps were also taken to subtitle some major papers as 'Read before the Natural History Society of Glasgow'. Clearly in the 1850s the newly-formed Glasgow Society was obviously trying to get as much publicity as possible, and rightly so. So why later attempt to indicate in the 1868 Note that there was little of interest during the 1850s, which was manifestly untrue? Why not draw proper attention to all the accounts of meetings and major papers previously published elsewhere under the Society's name? This is the real problem.

Although announcements such as the 1868 Note would usually have been written by the Society's current Secretary, at that time the distinguished Robert Gray, it is very difficult to believe that Gray, the most meticulous of recorders, would ever have permitted such ambiguous, or plainly incorrect, statements to appear. Some other explanation is required, and although several suggest themselves, only one seems reasonably likely.

Possibly the simplest explanation for the confusion is that the 1868 Note was very much a last-minute addition, put together in something of a hurry when it was realised, rather late in the day, that the Society had to give some kind of explanation for restarting publication in 1868, but with no reports of its meetings from 1851 to 1859. A last-minute additional preliminary page, not numbered, might also explain why it was too late to include the Note in the presumably already-printed List of Contents.

Possibly the anonymous official of the Society who had to produce the 1868 Note for the printer in a great hurry was insufficiently informed about the Society's early history, and was genuinely unaware that all these earlier *Proceedings* of the Society had already appeared in print; 1868, of course, was some twelve to sixteen years after the events. Possibly there was no opportunity or time to consult senior and more knowledgeable members of the Society, or possibly he simply did not appreciate that this was necessary. It should be realised that at the time of the Annual General Meeting of 1868 only two of the fourteen Office-Bearers and Members of Council were original members of the Society, so it is perfectly possible that knowledge of the early years of the Society was not widespread. There is also the likelihood that the relevant Minutes were either missing or "not sufficiently described".

It is certainly something of a mystery, which we are now never likely to solve, but there is no doubt that these published materials remain an important part of the Society's early history and their existence should finally be placed on record.

SUMMARY

In its sections on 'Proceedings of Societies', Morris's *Naturalist* published accounts of nineteen meetings of the Natural History Society of Glasgow; accounts of the first six of these meetings, from July to December 1851, were also published by the Society in its first volume of *Proceedings* (1852). The remaining thirteen meetings extended over the next three years to the end of 1854, and at least nine meetings were reported in considerable detail, some containing material certainly as contemporarily important as other matters reported in the Glasgow Society's own published *Proceedings*, earlier or later. In addition, several papers, subtitled 'Read before the Natural History Society of Glasgow', were published *in extenso*, up to 1857. The reason why this earlier published material was not drawn to the attention of members is not known.

It may be that some *Proceedings* of the Society also appeared in other journals but, if so, I have not yet come across them despite extensive searches, and shall be grateful to have any additional items drawn to my attention.